

Testimony in support of HB 4678 and 4679 from:

Ecology Center, Detroit Parents Lead Advocacy Group, Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies, Learning Disabilities Association of America's Healthy Children Project, Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, Michigan Environmental Council, and Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan

May 26, 2022

Dear Chairwoman Kahle and Members of the Michigan House Health Policy Committee,

Thank you for holding a hearing on HB 4678 and 4679. The Ecology Center, Detroit Parents Lead Advocacy Group, Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies, Learning Disabilities Association of America's Healthy Children Project, Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, Michigan Environmental Council, and Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan are writing to offer our support for these important bills. Ensuring that all children are tested for lead exposure at approximately one and two years of age is critically important and has been a stated goal and priority for many years of our organizations, the State's own Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission, the Michigan Alliance for Lead Safe Homes, and the Lead Impacted Families Together Parents' Platform. While the bills being considered today require "screening" at least once for all children between 6 to 12 months old and 2 to 3 years old, we understand that "screening" in this case is meant to indicate blood lead testing. We encourage the bill sponsors to offer a substitute to the bills that more clearly defines "screening" as a blood lead test.

These bills are so vitally important because we know there is no safe level of lead for human exposure. Lead is a potent neurotoxin and poisonous heavy metal that can impact children for a lifetime. Young children are the most vulnerable to lead poisoning and suffer severe impacts, particularly due to their rapidly developing brains and nervous systems. At an early age, exposure to lead can cause irreversible brain injury, shortening of attention span, and disruption of behavior.

These bills target testing children when they are both very vulnerable to the effects of lead and typically most highly exposed. Babies and toddlers are highly exposed to lead dust and soil because they crawl and play on the ground and, as any parent knows, explore their world by placing their hands, toys, and other objects in their mouths. If lead-contaminated soil or dust is present in their environments they are more likely to ingest it than older children or adults.

In 2016, the Flint Water Crisis rightfully brought renewed attention to the critical issue of childhood lead poisoning in Michigan and throughout the United States. However, even before the Flint crisis, Michigan was one of the worst states in the nation in terms of the proportion of children with elevated blood lead levels. Michigan has a history of heavy industrial pollution, old housing stock, lead service lines in many communities, and crumbling infrastructure. These factors are closely linked to high rates of elevated blood lead levels.

However, when we detect lead exposure early in children we are better able to connect them with the services they need to overcome their exposure and identify lead hazards in their homes that must be remediated to protect them and their siblings. Unfortunately, we know that many children fall through the cracks in our current system and are not tested for lead exposure. In Michigan, we only test a very small percentage of all children under age six. Too often the parents that our organizations work with share stories of kids who were inadvertently exposed to lead for an extended period during a DIY home remodel or when a family moved into an older home that, unbeknownst to them, contained lead paint, dust, soil, or pipes.

Lead contamination impacts families in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Michigan because over 70% of our housing stock was built before lead paint was banned in 1978. In the last few years, Michigan has done an excellent job of leveraging state and federal resources to clean up lead-contaminated homes and provide services to lead-impacted families. However,

families cannot access these resources if they aren't aware that their child has been exposed to lead. Universal testing of our young children would ensure they have access to the services they need and remediation services offered by the state or their municipalities.

Thank you for taking the time to consider HB 4678 and 4979. We hope you will support these bills and welcome any questions you may have for us. Please reach out to Rebecca Meuninck with any questions 734-276-8005, rebecca@ecocenter.org.

Sincerely,

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